

A Ministry, a Retreat and a Miracle

Women at the Well is a new ministry at Saint Elizabeth Parish. It's a beautiful gathering of women who are interested in diving deeper into the Sunday Mass readings to nurture and nourish a dynamic, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The group meets regularly and also takes occasional retreats.

"Being involved in Women at the Well for the past four years helped me go from just studying the scriptures to entering into the heart of scriptures through prayerful listening," said Corinne Murphy, one of the group leaders. "The women I meet each week inspire me with their openness to hear the Word of God and conform to its teachings."



Participants in Women at the Well went on a retreat this summer honoring Fr. Walter Ciszek.

Last summer, after reading Father Walter Ciszek's book, *He Leadeth Me*, some participants in Women at the Well went on retreat at the Jesuit Spirituality Center in Wernersville, PA, the place of Fr. Walter's gravesite. "We were inspired to be doers of the Word and not simply hearers," said Corinne. "Fr. Walter's personal experience in captivity, although extreme, provided us with insights on ways we can better understand how God works in our lives, through pain and suffering."

The women participated in faith sharing, book discussions and daily Mass. They also had a surprise visit from a Jesuit Priest who was Fr. Walter's former assistant at Fordham University. "The priest shared the human side of Fr. Walter - his humility, gentle spirit and fun nature," said Corinne.

While on the retreat, parishioner Suzanne Wickersham gave a personal testimony and promoted the cause for Fr. Walter's beatification. "I had chronic nerve pain from the waist down and through the pelvic area.

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Dates of Interest

December 1-16
Advent Giving Tree

Monday-Wednesday, December 3-5
EFF Advent Prayer Services
5:00 PM Mon. and Wed.
6:30 PM Tues.

Friday-Saturday, December 7-8
Holy Day of the
Immaculate Conception
Fri. Vigil Mass – 5:30 PM
Sat. Mass – 8:30 AM, 12:00 PM

Sunday, December 9
Presentation of First Holy
Communion Candidates
9:30 AM Mass

Tuesday, December 18
Advent Penance Service with
Individual Confessions at 7:00 PM

Saturday, December 22
Christmas Confessions from
9:00-11:00 AM

Monday, December 24
Christmas Eve
Mass at 4:30 PM and 7:30 PM

Tuesday, December 25
Christmas Day Masses
8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

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Getting to Know our Visiting Seminarians

You may have noticed some new friendly faces around the church and education center. Each Thursday, Pre-Theology seminarians Ross Williams and Tim Courtney help teach religion at the parish school, visit sick and homebound parishioners and participate in various parish committee meetings and other events.

Here's more about the two seminarians serving at Saint Elizabeth this year:

Ross Williams, Pre-Theology student at Saint Charles Seminary, Diocese of Raleigh:

Ross grew up in Cary, North Carolina, where he attended Saint Michael the Archangel Parish and Green Hope High School. He often considered becoming a deacon, but figured it was something he would do later in life. After obtaining a Bachelor's Degree from NC State University, he debated between continuing his education in a Master's program or entering the work-force when God showed him a different path.

He describes his time at Saint Charles Seminary as all-consuming, with a considerable amount of class work added to spiritual and human formation. "We have a joke that the days are long, but the weeks are short," explained Ross. "They are preparing us to be parish priests, so getting used to this type of schedule is quite reasonable, and I wouldn't trade this experience. I love it here. Our faculty is well-respected and always willing to help."

Saint Elizabeth reminds Ross of his home parish—large, located in

an area with a growing population and vibrant. "Every interaction I've had with priests, staff and volunteers has been great," he said. "Saint Elizabeth has an energy that many parishes lack."

As far as his vocational goals, Ross noted, "I really have only one goal now: to study for and discern the priesthood. After that, it is up to the bishop. I believe I will be happy wherever I am sent, be it in a parish, at a school, or in a diocesan office."

When he is not studying at Saint Charles Seminary and helping out at our parish, Ross enjoys reading, computer programming and gaming, as well as learning to play the organ.

Tim Courtney, Pre-Theology student at Saint Charles Seminary, Diocese of Arlington:

Tim is from Fairfax, VA. He grew up attending Saint Rita of Cascia Parish in Alexandria. "My calling to the priesthood came subtly, he explained. "I often found myself wondering how men know when they are being called, what it would be like to be a priest and whether or not I would be good at it. Eventually, I reached out to a family member who is a priest and he helped me to discern my own vocation. I applied to the seminary and went on to have the most grace-filled year of my life at Saint Charles Borromeo."

"It's been wonderful to get to know the staff, parishioners and parish school children. It's a bustling parish with many awesome ministries and events. While it's larger than the parish in which I

grew up, I am struck by the tremendous sense of community."



Ross Williams and Tim Courtney, Pre-Theology students at Saint Charles Seminary, are assigned to serve at our parish this year.

"My only goal is to be ordained a priest and to spend my life serving God in the Arlington Diocese. This tends not to play out very well with the Philadelphia crowd, because I'm an avid Washington Nationals fan and bobble head collector," laughed Tim, who also enjoys studying languages and American history.

~ Julie Krumenacker

In our next issue, get to know Deacon Carson Kain, a fourth year Theology student at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, who is also serving our parish this year.

The Pastoral Plan Activated: Part 1 of 3

This is the first in a three-part series of articles that will help parishioners become more familiar with the 2017-2021 Pastoral Plan and how it is being put into practice. Diane Shoemaker, a member of the Implementation Committee, writes about the committee's efforts to initiate constructive dialogue between leaders of our various parish ministries, so there is greater coordination of efforts in their work to meet the goals of the pastoral plan and to enhance the life of our parish community.

The Pastoral Plan Implementation Committee (PPIC), organized in the spring of 2018, is charged by the pastor and the Pastoral Council with educating the parish about the 2017-2021 Pastoral Plan and fostering its implementation. The comprehensive plan begins with the *Vision*: "We are called by Jesus Christ to grow as a community of disciples, deepen our faith and be grateful stewards of God's gifts." This can seem daunting – to live out our lives as disciples of Jesus. Saint Elizabeth Parish is here to help and, essentially, this is what the Pastoral Plan is all about. Whether you are 7 or 70 years old, there are a myriad of ways to deepen your faith as disciples of Christ. These include ministries like Elementary Faith Formation, Adult Bible Study, Women at the Well, Walking with Purpose and the overnight renewal, *Christ Renews His Parish* – just to name a few!

An essential element of the Vision is the call to stewardship, which has been a key to parish life since the founding of Saint Elizabeth Church in July, 2000. Engaging fellow parishioners in putting the pastoral plan into practice is the



primary goal of the PPIC. To accomplish this goal, the committee initiated an awareness campaign, beginning with a workshop in June for parish ministry leaders. The workshop brought together 62 parishioners, representing approximately 60 ministries and organizations at Saint Elizabeth. These parish stewards collaborated enthusiastically and wanted to continue to learn about each other's ministries and how they might cooperate on future programs and events.

Next, the PPIC reached out to individual ministry groups, offering PPIC team members to provide a mini briefing on the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives of the Plan. In turn, it is expected that all parish ministry groups will find ways to incorporate the pastoral plan into their programs and events. A follow-up workshop for ministry leaders was held in November to discuss how to encourage leadership development and enhance parish communications, two of the six goals of the 2017-2021 Pastoral Plan.

There is more to come! Look for

signage around the church campus, along with bulletin, website and social media posts exploring the various components of the plan and encouraging action by all. If we all listen well enough, we may hear Jesus calling us to be 21st Century disciples.

For more information on the 2017-2021 Pastoral Plan, please visit the parish website.

~ Diane Shoemaker, Elisa Sheronas

More Dates of Interest

*Monday-Tuesday,
December 31-January 1*
Mary, Mother of God
Mon. Vigil Mass at 5:30 PM
Tues. Mass at 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

Sunday, January 13
Presentation of
Confirmation Candidates
9:30 AM Mass

January 27-February 1
Catholic Schools Week
Open House: Sun., 12:30-2:00 PM

February 2-3
The Feast of Saint Blaise
Blessing of Throats at weekend
Masses

Ash Wednesday, March 6
Mass at 7:30 AM and 7:00 PM
Liturgy of the Word with Ashes
11:00 AM and 4:45 PM

Lenten Fridays, March 8-April 12
Stations of the Cross and
Benediction
7:00 PM

School Spirits: New Talent Added to Teaching Staff

The school year is well underway for 298 parish children with a renewed enthusiasm and spirit for a fruitful year! The student body welcomed four new staff members to Saint Elizabeth Parish School. Here's a little insight into their backgrounds and the talents they bring.

Ms. Meghan Hickey, Third Grade

Meghan is excited about her first position in a Catholic school and says she loves being greeted each morning by the smiling faces of her students. "I've really enjoyed getting to know all the students on a more in-depth level, especially when I help out with the Cares program during the afternoons," Meghan explained. A graduate of Millersville University, Meghan earned a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, with a minor in Athletic Coaching. Meghan's experience brings a focused understanding of her students. She added, "I am looking forward to seeing how much my students grow from the beginning to the end of the year."

Dr. Mary Gratton, Seventh Grade Religion, Seventh & Eighth Grade English Language Arts

Mary is quick to point out how the faculty, staff, parents and students have made her feel welcome during this first year at our parish school. "I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know everyone who is part of the parish community," she said. As a graduate of Bishop Shanahan High School, her roots are local. Mary studied for her undergraduate degree at Villanova University, received a master's degree from Penn State

and earned a doctorate this past spring from Fordham University. Before coming to Saint Elizabeth, Mary taught at Villa Maria Academy for seven years. "I look forward to watching my students fall in love with books and real-



Four new faculty members of Saint Elizabeth Parish School include (clockwise): Meghan Hickey, Dr. Mary Gratton, Ellie Dougherty and Judy Anderson.

ize the power of their written words," said Mary. "Whether they are writing about their faith, books or contemporary topics, it's always incredible to watch them go through this process."

Mrs. Ellie Dougherty, Kindergarten/Second Grade Teacher Aide

A familiar face to the Saint Elizabeth community, Ellie has been a substitute for aides and teachers over the years. Her experiences as an aide at Saint Basil School in Kimberton, and as a social worker and counselor for Catholic So-

cial Services have prepared her well for her more regular role at Saint Elizabeth Parish School. "A good day for me is connecting with the children and feeling they are engaged with their school experience," Ellie said. "I enjoy seeing the children's enthusiasm, particularly how excited they are to learn about their Catholic faith."

Mrs. Judy Anderson, Spanish

One of Judy's passions has always been foreign languages and cultures. She, too, is no stranger to our parish school, having substituted here dur-

ing the past eight years. Now as the regular Spanish teacher for grades 4-8 she finds the staff to be welcoming and helpful. "The students are eagerly learning and I anticipate a very productive school year," she said. Judy graduated from West Chester University and has taught English as a second language for grades 1-12, as well as Spanish for a local night school program. Judy concluded, "I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to teach such wonderful boys and girls!"

~ Amy Giampietro

One Parish Teen's Mission to Save the World

The teen years are demanding – hormones doing backflips, relationship uncertainty (does the cute boy like me?), friendship drama, peer pressure, constant stress of school, SAT anxiety, keeping up with *SnapChat*. Oh, and then there's acne – did God really have to bless teenagers with that lovely "gift"?!?

As a teen myself, I can affirm that it's a lot. So how are we supposed to squeeze in any time for others?

Anna Rago, 16, can tell you. A parishioner at Saint Elizabeth, she has unlocked the secrets of thriving as a teenager while simultaneously saving the world. Literally!

It started when Anna was in 7th grade and she attended a student leadership camp at Villanova University called "Spark the Wave." The camp members formed a service project to help the people of Malawi, a landlocked country in southeastern Africa, through Philadelphia-based *Pamoza International*, whose mission is to unite people in alleviating suffering and despair through Christian outreach and sustainable community development. The founder was born in Malawi, the third poorest country in the world.

"I was really moved hearing about the way students my age live in Malawi," said Anna. "During the Villanova camp, we were challenged to organize and execute a service project for an organization, and we chose *Pamoza*. Our group organized a 5K run to raise money for education. After that, my relationship with *Pamoza* grew."

Anna introduced *Pamoza* to her classmates at St. Anastasia Parish School that September, and the rest is history. Profoundly sympathetic to the extreme state of poverty in Malawi, Anna started coordinating service projects, and raised both money and awareness for their plight. Anna is now a junior at Villa Maria High School and has sacrificed many extracurricular activities to continue devoting her spare time to the people of Malawi. Last year, Anna organized a movie night fundraiser and raised enough donations to send two Malawi girls to high school.

(Did I mention that Anna also received Outstanding Achievement Awards in both science and math?!?)

3,000 miles, 17 Hours and 1 Amazing Trip

Anna's passion to help others is boundless, as she proved last summer when she embarked on a *Pamoza* mission trip to Africa. Eight volunteers ranging in age from 82 to 15 (Anna) took off from JFK airport in late June and arrived at their destination almost a full day later. The group spent three weeks learning about the real-life needs of the Malawi people and *Pamoza's* key initiatives.

Pamoza focuses on five main areas of service: 1) Christian Outreach; 2) Agriculture; 3) Education; 4) Health; and 5) Entrepreneurship to help the Malawi people build businesses and become self-sustaining. "*Pamoza's* ap-

proach is unique because they provide support for urgent needs as well as teach the community members how to take care of themselves and become independent," Anna explained.

"The Education program is one of my favorite initiatives," continued Anna. "Kids trek miles to get to school each day, leaving at 5 a.m. and walking as long as two hours in the blistering heat. When they arrive, they are tired and hungry so we provide them with breakfast



Special thanks to Saint Elizabeth Parish for helping to fund Anna Rago's mission trip to Malawi, Africa.

and a prayer service before anything academic. They need so much help. There is an extreme shortage of teachers, often just one teacher will handle all eight grades! In some buildings, there are no desks or even floors. It's also not uncommon to be age 16 but only in the equivalent of 4th or 5th grade."

Despite their poverty, the Malawi people are very connected to God. "Each day begins with prayer and bible readings. Everyone is quiet, so focused on worship," she said.

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Women at the Well (cont'd)

For nine years I tried at least 20 different medications a day to help relieve the pain," said Suzanne. "I learned about Fr. Walter from a friend who is a Jesuit priest. He suggested I pray and ask for Fr. Walter's intercession, which I did. A month later, I was free of all pain. I am completely healed." Suzanne's story was sent to Rome to support the consideration of Fr. Walter for sainthood.

Visiting his gravesite, Suzanne had time to reflect on Fr. Walter's life and how grateful she is for his life and her life. "I thank God every day for his intercession. My husband and I have handed out over 700 Fr. Walter prayer cards. We believe he will become a saint," she said.

Fifty-five years ago on October 12, 1963, Fr. Walter Cizek arrived in New York after 23 years in Russia where he was held in captivity in Siberian labor camps and prisons. With the help of President John F. Kennedy, he and an American student were returned to the United States in exchange for two Soviet agents. Following his return, Fr. Walter worked at the John XXIII Center at Fordham University until his death in 1984.

While in captivity, Fr. Walter found ways to hear confessions and say Mass. "For all the hardships and suffering endured there, the prison camps of Siberia held one great consolation for me: I was able to function as a priest again. I was able to say

Mass again, although in secret, to hear confessions, to baptize, to comfort the sick, and to minister to the dying," he wrote.

Fr. Walter's cause for canonization was formally opened in March, 2012. The Walter Cizek Prayer League, dedicated to the cause, maintains a museum in his birthplace of Shenandoah, PA.

"Fr. Walter was our retreat director the entire time, from opening up his book last summer to our closing meal at the Eucharistic table," said Corinne. "We felt his presence guiding our discussions and opening up new windows of thought on prayer, scripture, community, the Eucharist and the mercy of God."

~ Dave Guthrie

Teen's Mission (cont'd)

Anna also supported the health initiatives. "People came from miles away for basic vaccines but there wasn't enough for everyone," Anna lamented. "They also didn't have enough nurses or doctors, so some people were turned away. It was so sad. When we returned home from our trip, we helped raise \$15,000 to fund a full-time nurse to live on-site and be on-call 24x7."

Lions, Tigers ...and Elephants!

Anna spent her last couple of days exploring the area. She went on a safari and took hundreds of pictures of wildlife from gazelles and hippos to monkeys and elephants. "I love elephants. We got so close to a mother and her baby

that I could almost feel their breath. It was really cool!"

(Hmm...I traveled to a sandy plain this summer, too, where exotic creatures roamed: The Jersey Shore. That's not the same?!?!)

Anna's selfless work continues. She is currently organizing the first gala for Pamoza which will take place at White Manor Country Club in Malvern on March 23, 2019. For all her good works, Anna was nominated for the Liberty Museum and TD Bank's Young Heroes Award and was named the Main Line Student of the Week in October.

"Someday, I will go back to Malawi. I miss the beautiful people.

I miss helping them rise up from their circumstances and I miss the feeling that it gives me. This is my passion," Anna concluded.

Clearly, Anna has figured out the secret to thriving during the teenage years. As it turns out, the secret isn't too complicated: focus less on oneself and more on others.

Thanks, Anna, for making that look easy....now – back to SAT homework.

~ Taylor Barbadora
(Guest Contributor)

To learn more about Pamoza International, visit www.pamoza.org

Family Spirits: Meet the Rago Family!

Cher and Joe Rago met when they were 16 years old and little did they know what their adolescent romance would blossom into later in life.

Cher attended Haverford High School and was a member of Saint Denis Parish while Joe attended Upper Darby High School and was a member of St. Laurence Parish. The neighboring parishes are less than three miles apart so it wasn't surprising that the two ran into each other at a local ice skating rink while hanging out with their friends. It was almost love at first sight! Sure enough, the two married a few years after graduating from college.

Today, Cher and Joe are active members of Saint Elizabeth Parish and have two remarkable daughters – Anna, 16 years old and a junior at Villa Maria High School; and Grace, 12 years old and in 7th grade at Saint Elizabeth Parish School.

Anna played volleyball and softball until her sophomore year when she decided to pursue her desire to serve others through various volunteering opportunities (see article on page 5). This past October, she was named the *Main Line Student of the Week*.

Grace plays volleyball and basketball in the Saint Elizabeth Athletic Ministry (SEAM) and is active in Middle School Youth Group. The Ragos enjoy outdoor family activities such as hiking, rock climbing and biking. They also love to travel and recently explored the coast of California together. Next, they are planning a trip to Europe.



Cher and Joe Rago, with their daughters Grace (left) and Anna (right), joined the parish in 2016.

Cher is the Director of Communications for the Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova and editor of the *Augustinian* magazine, which is published three times a year and highlights the missions and various ministries of the Province of St. Thomas of Villanova. Joe is the Senior Vice President of Commercial Real Estate and Finance for Firsttrust Bank.

The Rago family came to Saint Elizabeth Parish in 2016 after moving from Newtown Square and Saint Anastasia Parish. Cher is a member of Saint Elizabeth's Pastoral Plan Implementation Committee. "Saint Elizabeth Parish is like a breath of fresh air," said Cher, "The community is very welcoming and makes newcomers feel right at home. Father

Mullin takes particular care to greet each person by name as they enter the church. There is nothing quite like a genuine greeting as if to say you have arrived now, it's time to rest and rejoice. Like most families, we are always on the go and Saint Elizabeth uniquely gives us the space to pause and regroup before entering Mass."

Cher is interested in becoming more involved with our Adult Faith Formation ministry. "Saint Elizabeth has an impressive number

of ministries, which open the door for a variety of personalities to get involved with a faith-filled group of like-minded people," added Cher. Joe and Cher have also attended a few of the social activities like the Wine and the Bible event presented by Father John last year.

"The Saint Elizabeth community could not be more welcoming," said Joe. "Everyone has been extremely helpful in transitioning Grace to her new school and we have the highest regard for the priests and deacons at Saint Elizabeth. Considering the times, they are truly beacons of light for us all and a symbol of Christ's love."

~ Lisa Barbadora

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"Trick or Treat with the Saints" is the Elizabeth Ministry's annual Halloween event. Our guests enjoyed festive crafts, snacks and trick or treating around the church. It was a wonderful morning for all!



On September 27, the Lionville Community YMCA in partnership with the Chester County Interfaith Action Community hosted a panel discussion on the use of sacred texts in various religious traditions. Panelists included Imam Ejaz Sabir, Islamic Society of Chester County, Rabbi Jon Cutler, Beth Israel Congregation of Chester County, Achal Verna, Hari Om Mandir, and our own Rev. Thomas M. Mullin. Many of the Saint Elizabeth parishioners who attended the event found similarities in the role that sacred texts play in other religions.

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